CONVERSION: CONTINUING GROWTH AND DISCIPLINE

THE AUTOMATIC PILOT IN MODERN AIRPLANES IS A FASCINATING DEVICE. ONCE THE AIRPLANE IS ALOFT AND DIRECTED TOWARD ITS DESTINATION, THE AUTOMATIC PILOT IS PUT INTO ACTION, THE CONTROLS SET, AND THE HUMAN PILOT CAN SIT BACK AND RELAX WHILE THE PLANE CONTINUES PERFECTLY ON ITS COURSE, GUARANTTEED TO KEEP ON THE BEAM.

MANY CHURCH PEOPLE HAVE AN "AUTOMATIC PILOT" CONCEPT OF THE CHRISTIAN FAITH. WE THINK THAT ONCE OUR SIGHTS ARE LIFTED, ONCE WE'VE TAKEN THE STEP OF JOINING A CHURCH WE CAN SET THE CONTROLS TO AUTOMATIC PILOT AND EVERYTHING WILL TAKE CARE OF ITSELF. THERE'S ONLY ONE FLAW IN THE AUTOMATIC PILOT TYPE OF CHRISTIANITY--IT DOESN'T WORK. THE REASON IS THAT THERE IS NOTHING AUTOMATIC ABOUT THE CHRISTIAN LIFE. IN DISCUSSING THE NATURE AND NECESSITY OF CONVERSION LAST WEEK WE SAW THAT CHRISTIANITY IS A MATTER OF DECISION AND THAT A CHRISTIAN DECISION IS NEVER MADE ONCE AND FOR ALL. THE CONCLUSION OF THAT SERMON WAS THAT EVERYDAY BRINGS THE NECESSITY OF CHRISTIAN DECISION, THAT CONVERSION IS MORE OF A NEVER ENDING PROCESS THAN A ONE-SHOT AFFAIR. THIS MORNING I WISH TO CONTINUE, THE SAME DISCUSSION, SEEING IN WHAT WAYS CONVERSION IS A CONTINUOUS PROCESS: AND WHAT RESPONSIBILITIES BELONG TO THE INDIVIDUAL WHO HAS CLAIMED CHRIST AS HIS LORD.

WE CAN GO A STEP FURTHER THAN WE WENT LAST WEEK AND BEGIN BY SAYING THAT CONVERSION IS NEVER AN INITIAL ACT. NO ONE IS EVER FULLY, TOTALLY CONVERTED TO CHRIST

ALONG WITH COURAGEOUS AFFIRMATIONS THERE ARE DENIAL AND BETRAYALS IN EVERY MAN. AGAIN REMEMBER PETER, THE FIRST OF THE DISCIPLES, WHO PERSISTED IN DOUBTING, QUESTIONING AND FINALLY DENIED JESUS.

PAUL, THE GREATEST EVANGELIST OF THEM ALL WROTE TO THE CHRISTIANS AT CORINTH "BUT I, BRETHREN, COULD NOT ADDRESS YOU AS SPIRITUAL MEN, BUT AS BABES IN CHRIST. I FED YOU WITH MILK, NOT SOLID FOOD: FOR YOU WERE NOT READY FOR IT: AND EVEN YET YOU ARE NOT READY."

PAUL, FROM HIS OWN EXPERIENCE, KNEW THAT IT TAKES TIME TO BECOME A CHRISTIAN. HE HAD SPENT THREE FULL YEARS IN DAMASCUS, AFTER HIS CONVERSION EXPERIENCE, BEFORE HE EMBARKED ON HIS MINISTRY--SEEKING TO UNDERSTAND WHAT HAD HAPPENED TO HIM AND THE MISSION HE WAS CALLED TO FULFILL. THE SAME IS TRUE FOR US: CONCERNING CONVERSION, HARRY EMERSON FOSDICK WROTE "SUCH TRANSFORMATION OF LIFE DOES NOT HAPPEN IN A MOMENT: IT TAKES MORE THAN INSTANTANEOUS EXPOSURE TO TAKE THE LORD'S PICTURE ON A HUMAN HEART: BUT THE TIME EXPOSURE WILL DO IT."

WE ARE EXTREMELY CRITICAL OF THE TRAVELING EVANGELISTS WHO TURN THE PROCESS OF CONVERSION INTO A SINGLE EXPERIENCE, WHO SAVE PEOPLE'S SOULS AND THEN FORGET THEM. AND YET TO BE TRUTHFUL THE CHURCH DOES VERY LITTLE MORE THAN THIS. ALL THE EMPHASIS IS ON NUMBERS, NEW MEMBERS, ALL TOO FREQUENTLY JOINING THE

THE CHURCH IS THE HIGH POINT IN A PERSONAL RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE**AND THE REST OF THE WAY IS ALL DOWN HILL. THE EXACT OPPOSITE SHOULD BE THE CASE. TO DOCUMENT THIS ARGUMENT I CITE STATISTICS PROVIDED BY THE BOARD OF NATIONAL MISSIONS FOR EVERY TEN PERSONS WHO JOIN THE U.P. CHURCH IN THE USA SIX ARE PUT ON THE INACTIVE ROLL. ON A NATION WIDE SCALE THAT MEANS THAT ONLY FOUR OUT OF EVERY TEN NEW MEMBERS ARE EXPECTED TO SERIOUSLY APPLY THEMSELVES TO THE FAITH THE OTHER SIX CAN BE EXPECTED TO GRADUALLY FALL AWAY.

IF CONVERSION IS A CONTINUING PROCESS THESE STATISTICS SHOW A GRAVE LACKING IN THE CHURCH. EITHER NEW PEOPLE ARE NOT FULLY AWARE OF THE IMPLICATIONS OF CHURCH MEMBERSHIP OR ELSE THE CHURCH ITSELF IS TO BLAME FOR FAILING TO NUTURE AND SUSTAIN ITS NOVICES. THE CHURCH MUST BE BOTH EVANGELIST AND EDUCATOR, BOTH OBSTETRICIAN AND PEDIATRITION. IT MUST NEVER ALLOW ITS MEMBERS TO ENGAGE IN THE FRIVOLOUS COMFORT THAT IDENTIFIES CHRSITIANITY MATURITY WITH CHURCH MEMBERSHIP.

The source of

THE GROWING PAINS OF CHRISTIANITY ARE SUCCINCTLY SUMMED UP IN THAT PHRASE FROM OUR LORD'S PRAYER IN BETHSEMANE "NOT MY WILL BUT THINE BE DONE." MANY THINGS INTERFERE WITH OUR DEVOTION TO CHRIST: THE SURSUIT OF WEALTH AND PRESTIGE, OUR PERSONAL HATREDS AND DISLIKES: SOME FEEL THAT ALCOHOL AND TOBACCO INTERFERE WITH A PERSONS RELIGIOUS COMMITMENT. BUT IN THE FINAL ANALYSIS GRANTED THE LIMITED VALIDITY OF ALL THESE ARGUMENT: WHAT WE ARE TO DO IS TO DECIDE FOR CHRIST AND

AGAINST OURSELVES. THIS NATURALLY, IS THE REAL SOURCE OF GROWTH PAINS. BY NATURE WE WANT TO DO OUR WILL AND NO ONE ELSES'S. WE SIMPLY DON'T WANT TO TAKE UP A CROSS IF WE CAN AT ALL AVOID IT. EVEN AS WE DO GROW IN THE FAITH, APPLYING OURSELVES WHOLE HEARTEDLY WE FIND THAT WE ARE STILL ENSLAVED BY OUR TYRANNICAL SELF-will. THIS IS NOT NEW EITHER: OUT OF AN AGONIZING STRUGGLE TO DO GOD'S WILL PAUL WROTE TO THE ROMANS: "I DO NOT UNDERSTAND MY OWN ACTIONS. FOR I DO NOT DO WHAT I WANT, BUT THE VERY THING I HATE...I CAN WILL WHAT IS RIGHT, BUT I CANNOT DO IT. FOR I DO NOT DO THE GOOD I WANT, BUT THE EVIL I DO NOT WANT IS WHAT I DO....WRETCHED MAN THAT I AM! WHO WI DELIVER ME FROM THIS BODY OF DEATH?" ROM. 7 THIS COMING FROM THE MAN WHO KNEW THE WORDS SACRIFICE AND OBEDIENCE MORE THAN ANY OTHER. "WRETCHED MAN THAT I AM!"

THERE IS MUCH TO BE LEARNED HERE. IT IS ONE OF THE DEEP AND BEAUTIFUL PARADOXES OF THE CHRISTIAN FAITH THAT PRECISELY WHEN WE THINK WE ARE GROWING LEAST WE ARE G GROWING MOST. "WHO WILL DELIVER ME FROM THIS BODY OF DEATH PAUL ASKED. WHO WILL RESOLVE THIS INTERMINABLE CONFLICT BETWEEN MY OWN WILL AND THE WILL OF GOD? PAUL KNEW THE ANSWER. CHRIST WOULD DELIVER HIM; HE HAD OBEYED GOD'S CALL WITHOUT RESERVATION THERE WAS NO MORE HE COULD DO. WHEN WE FEEL, OPPOSITE, HOWEVER: WHEN WE THINK WE'VE ARRIVED WHEN WE ARE PROUD OF OUR PERSONAL PIETY WE ARE ACTUALLY AT A SPIRITUAL STAND STILL. THIS IS PERHAPS THE MOST CRUCIAL PROBLEM FACING CON-

TEMPORARY CHRISTIANITY. WE ARE SO CONVINCED THAT ALL GOD WANTS OF US IS SPORADIC CHURCH ATTENDANCE THAT WE HAVE ALLOWED OURSELVES TO WALLOW IN COMPLACENCY AND SATISFACTION. WE NEED TO BE JARRED OUT OF THIS STATE BY REALIZING THAT CHRISTIANITY IS NEVER FULFILLED; THAT TO BE A CHRISTIAN MEANS TO CONSCIOUSLY, WILL TO OBEY CHRIST IN EVERY MINUTE OF EVERYDAY. IT MEANS THE HARSH RECOGNITION THAT WE ARE ALWAYS FALLING SHORT, AND THAT WITHOUT HIS GRACE AND FORGIVENESS WE WOULD WNEVER DARE TAKE THE NAME CHRISTIAN ON OUR LIPS.

SINCE CONVERSION IS A PROCESS OF GROWTH, THE GOAL OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE IS MATURITY IN CHRIST. PAUL DELVES INTO CHRISTIAN MATURITY IN LENGTH IN HIS LETTERS TO THE GALATIANS AND COLLOSIANS. AND IN THE LATTER HE CONCLUDES BY SAYING "WHATEVER YOU DO, IN WORD OR DEED, DO EVERYTHING IN THE NAME OF THE LORD JESUS, GIVING THANKS TO GOD THROUGH HIM." WHATEVER YOU DO! DO EVERYTHING IN THE NAME OF JESUS CHRIST! THERE IS NO SUNDAY CHRISTIANITY HERE: THERE IS NO IMPLICATION OF THAT POPULAR CONCEPT OF KEEPING RELIGION IN ITS PLACE, ALL BOXED UP ON SUNDAY MORNING. IT IS A CLEAR STATEMENT THAT BEING CHRISTIAN MEANS OPENING ALL THE DOORS OF OUR LIVES TO JESUS CHRIST, WITHHOLDING NOTHING, DOING EVERYTHING IN HIS NAME. THIS IS AS IMPORTANT TO THE ACCOUNTANT AS IT IS THE MINISTER: TO THE HOUSEWIFE, LABORER AND MISSIONARY ALIKE. BEING A CHRISTIAN MEANS THAT WE WILL LIVE, NOT FOR OURSELVES, BUT

FOR GOD. IT MEANS TO SEE THE WORLD THROUGH "CHRIST--COLORED GLASSES: IT IS TO ASK, IN EVERY NEW SITUATION, "WHAT IS GOD'S WILL FOR ME HERE AND NOW?"

I TRULY WANDER HOW MANY OF US TAKE OUR FAITH AND OUR LORD THAT SERIOUSLY. IT SEEMS PATHETICALLY OBVIOUS THAT WE HAVE SO WARPED AND ALTERED THE CHRISTIAN FAITH TO CORRESPOND TO OUR LIKES AND DISLIKES, THAT IT BARELY RESEMBLES THE ABSOLUTE OBEDIANCE DISPLAYED BY THE APOSTLES. WE HAVE LOST SOMETHING INTEGRAL HERE, WE HAVE REPLACED CONVERSION WITH JOINING A CHURCH: WE HAVE SUBSTITUTED POPULAR RELIGION FOR CHRISTIAN GROWTH.

AND SO WE NEED TO DIG EVEN DEEPER, TURNING TO THE SECOND HALF OF THE SERMON TITLE--THAT CONVERSION ENDURES IN DISCIPLINE. TO A LIBERAL PROTESTANT CONGREGATION THIS IS ABOUT AS DISTASTEFUL A STATEMENT AS CAN BE MADE. THE WORD CONVERSION REMINDS OF FUNDAMENTALIST REVIVAL MEETINGS AND DISCIPLINE CARRIES WITH IT VISIONS OF THE SPANISH INQUISITION. AND SO WE OF THE LIBERAL PROT. TRADITION HAVE ACCOMMODATED OUR FAITH, AS THESE OTHER TWO BRANCHES HAVE NOT, TO THE CULTURAL CLIMATE OF THE FREE AND EASY. THERE IS NO LONGER ANY MARKED DIFFERENCE IN BEHAVIOR OR OUTLOOK UPON LIFE BETWEEN THE AVERAGE CHURCH MEMBER AND HIS UNCHURCHED NEIGHBOR. WHY? BECAUSE LIBERAL PROTESTANTS ARE NOTORIOUSLY UNDISCIPLINED CHRISTIANS. I WOULD VENTURE THE GUESS THAT A MEMBER OF EITHER BAPTIST CHURCH IN DYER, OR OF THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH, WHO IS IRREGULAR IN ATTENDANCE, SERVICE AND GIVING, WOULD

SOON HEAR ABOUT IT. THE RATIONALIZATION IS THAT WE ARE PROTESTANTS WE ARE FREE. WE'RE NOT LIKE THE FUNDAMENTALISTS OR THE CATHOLICS NOBODY CAN TELL US WHAT TO DO AND WE ARE RIGHT, FREEDOM IS THE GLORIOUS AND BIBLICAL BASIS OF THE REFORMED TRADITION. BUT, AND IT IS A BIG BUT, THIS FREEDOM DOES NOT MEAN IRRESPONSIBILITY: IT DOESN'T MEAN WE DON'T CARE ABOUT WORSHIPPING REGULARLY OR GIVING GENEROUSLY. THE PROT. DOCTRINE OF FREEDOM IS BUILT SOLELY ON THE ASSUMPTION THAT CHRISTIAN MEN WILL SEARCH THE SCRIPTURE, TAKE A LONG LOOK AT THEIR LIVES AND THEN IMPOSE UPON THEMSELVES AN INTERNAL DISCIPLINE AND AUTHORITY. UNFORTUNATELY THE PEOPLE WHO ARE MOST VOCIFEROUS IN THEIR SCORN AND BELITTLEMENT OF ROMAN CATHOLICS ARE THOSE WHO ARE LEAST DISCIPLINED IN THEIR OWN RELIGIOUS HABITS. THE PRESENT DANGER IN THE PROT. CHURCH IS NOT TOO MUCH AUTHORITY BUT LAXITY, SELF INDULGENCE AND THE REJECTION OF ALL AUTHORITY AND DISCIPLINE.

IN HIS BOOK "WITNESS," whittaker chambers describes the DISCIPLINED LIFE OF AN UNDERGROUND COMMUNIST PARTY MEMBER. "UNDERGROUND WORKERS WERE ABSOLUTELY FORBIDDEN TO DRINK....AFTER THE FASHION OF COMMUNIST FRIENDS WE ALL SHARED OUR LODGINGS, OUR FOOD, OUR MONEY, EVEN OUR CLOTHES. TYPICALLY, UNDERGROUND WORKERS BELONGED TO A STUDY GROUP THAT MET ONCE A WEEK. AND IT WAS NOT UNUSUAL FOR MEMBERS OF SUCH GROUPS TO GIVE TEN PER CENT OF THEIR INCOME TO THE PARTY." DOES THIS SOUND AMAZING? DOESN'T IT SOUND LIKE SOMETHING OUT OF THE SECOND CHAPTER OF ACTS? DOESN'T IT M

MAKE A CERTAIN POINT UNCOMFORTABLY CLEAR? THIRTY MILLION COMMUNISTS ARE GRADUALLY SEIZING WORLD LEADERSHIP FROM EIGHT HUNDRED MILLION CHRISTIANS, BECAUSE THEY ARE DISCIPLINED TOTALLY COMMITTED, AND WE ARE NOT.

HOW MANY MEMBERS WOULD BE LEFT IN THE PROT. CHURCH IF SUDDENLY THESE RULES WERE MADE MEMBERSHIP REQUIREMENTS? HOW MANY WOULD REMAIN IN THIS CHURCH? I DON'T KNOW, BUT I WOULD HOPE THAT YOU ALL WOULD BE. IF NOT THE VERDICT IS CLEAR. COMMUNISM MEANS MORE TO THE COMMUNIST, THAN CHRISTIANITY TO THE CHRISTIAN. IF THIS IS TRUE--THERE IS NOT MUCH HOPE FOR THE WORLD. THIS MAY SOUND OVERLY DRAMATIC BUT IT IS THE CLEAR AND OBVIOUS TRUTH.

IN THE EARLY HOURS OF THE REFORMATION, CHRISTIAN MEN WERE NOT SO HESITANT TO DISCIPLINE. IN GENEVA, JOHN CALVIN, WAS SOLELY RESPONSIBLE FOR THE TRANSORMATION OF A BARBARIAN AND IMMORAL CITY INTO A CITADEL OF THE REFORMED FAITH. AND HE DID IT THROUGH DISCIPLINE. IF A PERSON TRANSGRESSED AGAINST THE STANDARD OF MORALITY ESTABLISHED BY THE CHURCH HE WAS EJECTED. IF HE PERSISTED HE WAS PUNISHED. NOW I'M NOT SO NAIVE AS TO RECOMMEND THE SUPERIMPOSITION OF 16 CENTURY PRACTICES ON MODERN SOCIETY THE POINT IS THAT THE REFORMATION TOOK HOLD, AND BECAME A VERTIABLE EXPLOSION-- BECAUSE THOSE ASSOCIATED WITH IT WERE DISCIPLINED AND COMMITTED TO CHRIST. ABSOLUTELY AND COMPLETELY, WITHOUT FEAR OR RESERVATION.

IN ENGLAND JOHN WESLEY WAS AWARE OF THE VERY SAME IMPORTANCE OF DISCIPLINE. IT WAS HIS HABIT TO PURGE THE METHODIST ~~XXXX~~SOCIETIES OF ALL NOMINAL MEMBERS. ON ONE OCCASION HE REDUCED THE SOCIETY OF 800 IN HALF.

ONCE AGAIN I AM NOT ENCOURAGING A YEARLY PURGE OF THE ROLL: ALTHOUGH THIS, UNFORTUNATELY, DOES BECOME NECESSARY. MY POINT IS SIMPLY THAT CHRISTIANITY ENDURES AND GROWS THROUGH DISCIPLINE: THAT THE CHURCH IN ITS PRESENT STATE HAS REJECTED DISCIPLINE OF ANY SORT AND SO HAS EMASCULATED ITSELF: UNTIL ITS MEMBERS REGARD IT AS JUST ONE EXTRA AND TIME CONSUMING ACTIVITY OUT OF MANY.

LET US FACE THIS THING SQUARELY, LOOKING TO THE NEW TESTAMENT AND TO OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST. LET US NOT HESITATE TO RECOGNIZE THAT THERE ARE INHERENT DISCIPLINERS IN THE CHRISTIAN FAITH: AND THAT WITHOUT THESE DISCIPLINES IT VERY SIMPLY CEASES TO BE RELIGION. THERE ARE MANY WAYS OF DESCRIBING THESE DISCIPLINES, BUT I THINK THERE ARE FOUR MAJOR CATEGORIES THAT WILL GIVE US A START. EACH OF THESE IS IMPORTANT ENOUGH TO BE DISCUSSED IN LENGTH: BUT TIME PROHIBITS AND SO I HOPE MY BRIEF DISCUSSION WILL AGITATE YOUR THINKING: AND HOPEFULLY PROMPT YOU TO TAKE THIS MATTER OF PERSONAL DISCIPLINE SERIOUSLY.

THE FIRST INHERENT DISCIPLINE IS CORPORATE WORSHIP. THE FIRST OBLIGATION OF THE CHRISTIAN AS A MEMBER OF THE BELIEVING COMMUNITY, IS TO WORSHIP GOD. I HAVE MENTIONED THIS BEFORE: AND IT GALLS ME JUST ENOUGH THAT I WILL CONTINUE TO MENTION IT:

THAT IN TALKING WITH PEOPLE ABOUT CHURCH MEMBERSHIP I ENCOUNTER THE REPLY TIME AND TIME AGAIN, "I CAN BE A CHRISTIAN WITHOUT JOINING A CHURCH. AS LONG AS I KEEP THE TEN COMMANDMENTS AND LEAD A GOOD LIFE. I'LL BE ALL RIGHT." THIS SOUNDS GOOD BUT WHERE IT COMES FROM I'LL NEVER KNOW. CERTAINLY NOT FROM THE NEW TESTAMENT.

NOW OBVIOUSLY THIS IS NOT THE CASE WITH MOST OF YOU. BUT IT IS PERTINENT TO YOU ~~XXXXXX~~ THE MEMBERS OF THE CHURCH " TO RECOGNIZE THAT ANYONE WHO REGARDS HIS ATTENDANCE AT SUNDAY WORSHIP AS AN OPTIONAL MATTER, DEPENDING ON WHIM, FANCY OR PERSONAL CONVENIENCE, IS NOT SERIOUSLY INTERESTED IN BEING A CHRISTIAN PERSON." THE CHURCH IS THE BODY OF CHRIST, ESTABLISHED BY HIM AS HIS SERVANT. IT IS FIRST OF ALL A BODY OF WORSHIPPING BELIEVERS. WHEN WE ~~XXX~~ CALL OURSELVES CHRISTIANS THERE IS NO ALTERNATIVE BUT TO EXPRESS THAT FAITH IN REGULAR CHRISTIAN WORSHIP.

THE SECOND INHERENT DISCIPLINE IS PRAYER. PRAYER, TOO, IS A SUBJECT THAT WARRANTS MORE THAN THIS SHORT RESUME. IT TOO LIES AT THE BOTTOM OF OUR FAITH. THERE CAN BE NO TRUE FAITH WITHOUT REGULAR AND CONSTANT COMMUNIO N WITH GOD. IT IS RE* MARKABLE HOW GOOD CHURCH MEMBERS REACT WHEN ASKED TO PRAYER. THE SIMPLE TASK OF THANKING GOD FOR FOOD APPEARS TO BE MORE THAN MOST OF US CAN HANDLE. PRAYER MUST BECOME A DISCIPLINE, A HABIT YOU ACQUIRE DAY BY DAY. IT NEED NOT BE LONG, OR SHORT, VOCAL OR SILENT, STANDING UP OR IN BED. BUT A FIRSTHAND EXPERIENCE OF THE POWER AND PRESENCE OF GOD COMES ONLY WHEN WE ENGAGE IN THE DISCIPLINE OF PRAYER.

THE THIRD MAJOR DISCIPLINE IS BIBLE READING. IN MY SHORT EXPERIENCE IN THE MINISTRY, COUNTLESS PEOPLE HAVE TOLD ME THEY DON'T READ THE BIBLE BECAUSE THEY DON'T UNDERSTAND IT. HERE AGAIN THIS REMARK IS USUALLY INDICATIVE OF A HALF HEARTED ATTEMPT. THERE ARE HUNDREDS OF COMMENTARIES AND HELPS TO READING THE BIBLE. BUT MORE IMPORTANT THAN STUDYING IT IS THE DISCIPLINED ACT OF RESERVING A PERIOD OF EVERYDAY TO READING IT. IT IS THE WORD OF GOD. GOD HAS USED IT TO SPEAK TO MEN OF EVERY GENERATION. WE ARE NO DIFFERENT.

FOURTHLY AND LASTLY, WE COME TO SACRIFICE AND SERVICE. THIS MEANS, VERY BLUNTLY, GIVING OUR MONEY TO GOD THROUGH THE CHURCH. WE WILL BE LAUNCHING OUR STEWARDSHIP COMMITMENT PROGRAM IN A FEW WEEKS AND SO I WILL NOT BELABOR THE POINT NOW. BUT LET US RECOGNIZE THAT REGULAR, PROPROTIONATE GIVING, IS NOT OPTIONAL TO CHRISTIANITY EITHER. IF WE ARE TO ALLOW GOD TO BE OUR AUTHORITY IF WE ARE TO BE PERFECTLY HONEST, TITHING, GIVING 10% OF OUR INCOME IS WHAT IS IMPLICIT IN THE BIBLE. BUT MORE IMPORTANT THAN THE AMOUNT IS THE INTERNAL AND PERSONAL REALIZATION THAT GIVING TO THE CHURCH IS A PERSONAL RESPONSE, AN ACT OF FAITH. THE LENGTHS WE ARE TO GO IN SERVICE ARE CLEARLY ILLUSTRATED THROUGHOUT THE N.T. IN PARABLES SUCH AS THE GOOD SAMARITAN AND ULTIMATELY BY OUR LORD WHEN HE TOOK UPON HIMSELF THE TASK OF WASHING THE FEET OF HIS FIRNEDS AFTER A LONG AND DUSTY JOURNEY.

THIS FOUR-FOLD DISCIPLINE MAY SOUND QUITE HARSH, AND YET IT IS ONLY THE BEGINNING OF THE LIFE WE ARE TOLD TO LEAD BY OUR LORD. AND THE REASON IT SOUNDS SO HARSH IS THAT FAR TOO LONG THE PROT. CHURCH HAS FAILED TO INFORM ITS MEMBERS AND THE WORLD THAT CHRISTIANITY IS NEITHER ENTERTAINING, NOR ALWAYS SATISFYING, IT IS NOT A GOOD PATRIOTIC VIRTUE, IT IS COMPLETE COMMITMENT AND OBEDIENCE TO THE VERY SON OF GOD.

CONVERSION AND GROWTH IN THIS FAITH PROCEEDS BY DISCIPLINE. WE KNOW, FROM MERELY TALKING ABOUT IT THAT IT IS A ROAD WE CANNOT WALK ALONE. LET US LISTEN IN FACT TO THE WORDS OF THE AUTHOR OF HEBREWS WHEN HE SAID:

"LET US RUN WITH PERSERVERANCE, THE RACE THAT IS SET BEFORE US, LOOKING TO JESUS, THE PIONEER AND PERFECTORER OF OUR FAITH.